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Major Abhilasha Barak Wins UN Military Gender Advocate Award 2025

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Major Abhilasha Barak Wins UN Military Gender Advocate Award 2025

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WHY IN NEWS:

On **May 22–23, 2026**, the United Nations announced **Major Abhilasha Barak** of the Indian Army as the recipient of the **2025 UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award**. Major Barak currently serves as **Commander of the Female Engagement Team (FET)** with the Indian Battalion deployed under **UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)**. She is also independently celebrated as **India's first woman combat aviator** of the Army Aviation Corps (qualified in 2022). The award will be conferred at **UN Headquarters in New York on May 29, 2026** — the **International Day of UN Peacekeepers**. Her selection makes her the **third Indian woman** to win the award in just seven years.

ABOUT THE AWARD

The **UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award** is a flagship recognition by the United Nations for peacekeepers who have advanced gender equality and the **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda** in field missions.

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Instituted	2016
Awarding body	UN Office of Military Affairs, Department of Peace Operations (DPO)
Frequency	Annual
Date of conferment	May 29 — International Day of UN Peacekeepers
Underlying mandate	UNSC Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000) — Women, Peace and Security

Selection Criteria

- Demonstrated contribution to **gender mainstreaming** within the peacekeeping mission
- Outreach to and protection of **women and girls** in conflict-affected communities
- Advancing **women's meaningful participation** in peace processes and local security structures
- Mentorship of female peacekeepers and host-nation security personnel

INDIAN WINNERS OF THE AWARD

India has produced an exceptional concentration of awardees in a short window — three women in seven years.

YEAR	OFFICER	MISSION	COUNTRY
2019	Major Suman Gawani	UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan)	South Sudan
2023	Major Radhika Sen	MONUSCO (UN Org Stabilization Mission)	DR Congo
2025	Major Abhilasha Barak	UNIFIL	Lebanon

- Major Suman Gawani is credited with training over 230 South Sudanese personnel — both men and women — on gender-sensitive practices
- Major Radhika Sen commanded the Indian Engagement Platoon in eastern DRC and built networks with conflict-displaced women
- Major Abhilasha Barak now leads the **Female Engagement Team** under one of UNIFIL’s largest troop-contributing contingents

MAJOR ABHILASHA BARAK — PROFILE

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Service	Indian Army — Army Aviation Corps
Pioneering distinction	First Indian woman combat aviator — qualified as Combat Army Aviator in May 2022
Current posting	FET Commander , Indian Battalion, UNIFIL (Lebanon)
Background	From Panchkula, Haryana; schooled at DPS Panchkula

Her dual recognition — as a combat aviation pioneer and now as a gender advocate in peacekeeping — illustrates a generational shift in the Indian armed forces’ inclusion trajectory.

ABOUT UNIFIL (UN INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON)

UNIFIL is one of the longest-running UN peacekeeping operations and is core to India’s peacekeeping commitments today.

ITEM	DETAIL
Established	March 19, 1978
Founding mandate	UNSC Resolutions 425 and 426 (1978) – monitor Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore peace and assist Lebanese authority
Expanded mandate	After 2006 Lebanon War – UNSC Resolution 1701 (August 2006)
Headquarters	Naqoura, southern Lebanon
Troop strength	Approximately 10,000 personnel from 50+ contributing countries
Indian contingent	Approximately 900 personnel – one of the larger contingents
India joined UNIFIL	1998

INDIA'S UN PEACEKEEPING LEGACY

India is among the most committed peacekeeping nations in UN history.

METRIC	STATUS
Rank among troop contributors	5th largest (current deployments)
Cumulative contribution since 1948	Over 2,90,000 personnel
Missions participated in	50+
Fatalities in line of duty	Over 175 Indian peacekeepers

Pioneering Deployments

- India's first peacekeeping deployment dates back to the Korean conflict in the early 1950s through the **Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC)**
- In **2007**, India deployed the **world's first all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU)** to Liberia (UNMIL), a milestone for gender in peacekeeping

UNSC RESOLUTION 1325 (2000) AND THE WPS AGENDA

The award's normative anchor is **UNSC Resolution 1325**, adopted unanimously on **October 31, 2000** – the first UN Security Council resolution explicitly addressing the gendered impact of armed conflict.

Four Pillars of WPS

- 1 **Participation** of women in peace processes
- 2 **Protection** of women and girls from conflict-related violence
- 3 **Prevention** of conflict and violence against women
- 4 **Relief and recovery** with gender-sensitive frameworks

Follow-On Resolutions

UNSC Resolutions **1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242** progressively strengthened the WPS architecture, addressing sexual violence in conflict and women’s leadership in peace mediation.

India’s **National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security** is under development.

WOMEN IN UN PEACEKEEPING — A GLOBAL PICTURE

INDICATOR	VALUE
Women in military UN peacekeeping (global)	Under 6% (recent UN data)
UN target for women in military peacekeeping	15% by 2028
India’s standing	Among the largest absolute deployers of women peacekeepers

The persistent under-representation of women in military components — even as police-component participation has grown — frames the strategic importance of award recipients such as Major Barak.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UN PEACEKEEPERS

The award ceremony is timed to **May 29 — the International Day of UN Peacekeepers**.

ITEM	DETAIL
Established by	UNGA Resolution 57/129 (December 2002)
First observed	2003
Commemorates	May 29, 1948 — the date the first UN peacekeeping mission (UN Truce Supervision Organization, UNTSO, in the Israel–Arab conflict) became operational
2026 theme	To be announced by UN DPO ahead of the conferment

OTHER HONOURS FOR INDIAN PEACEKEEPERS

- Several Indian commanders have received the **Param Vishisht Seva Medal** in part for distinguished UN service
- The **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal** is awarded posthumously to peacekeepers killed in the line of duty — multiple Indians have been recognised

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS Paper 1** — Indian Society: Women's empowerment, role of women in armed forces and global institutions
- **GS Paper 2** — International Relations: India and the UN, peacekeeping, UNSC reform debates, multilateral institutions
- **GS Paper 4** — Ethics: UN peacekeeping principles — consent, impartiality, minimum use of force; case-study material on courageous leadership and gender ethics
- **Prelims** — UN Military Gender Advocate Award, UNIFIL establishment date and HQ, UNSC Resolution 1325, International Day of UN Peacekeepers, India's all-female FPU in Liberia

FACTS CORNER

Award: UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award

Instituted: 2016 by the UN Office of Military Affairs, Department of Peace Operations (DPO)

Conferred on: May 29 — International Day of UN Peacekeepers

2025 winner: Major Abhilasha Barak (announced May 22–23, 2026)

Previous Indian winners: Major Suman Gawani (2019, UNMISS); Major Radhika Sen (2023, MONUSCO)

Major Abhilasha Barak: First Indian woman combat aviator, Army Aviation Corps (qualified 2022)

Current posting: Commander, Female Engagement Team (FET), Indian Battalion, UNIFIL

UNIFIL established: March 19, 1978 (UNSC Resolutions 425 and 426)

UNIFIL HQ: Naqoura, Lebanon; expanded mandate under UNSC Resolution 1701 (2006)

Indian contingent in UNIFIL: Approximately 900 personnel

UNSC Resolution 1325: October 31, 2000 — landmark Women, Peace and Security resolution

International Day of UN Peacekeepers: May 29 (since 2002, UNGA Resolution 57/129); commemorates first peacekeeping mission UNTSO, May 29, 1948

India's UN peacekeeping rank: 5th largest current contributor; over 2,90,000 personnel since 1948

India's first all-female peacekeeping unit: Liberia, 2007 (UNMIL — UN's first all-women FPU)

Women in UN military peacekeeping globally: under 6%

UN target: 15% women in military peacekeeping by 2028

Sources: [UN Peacekeeping](#), [PIB](#), [Indian Army](#)

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